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SOCIAL WORK, SOCIAL EDUCATION AND SOCIAL PEDAGOGY IN SCOTLAND

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Abstract

Conceptions of education in Scotland are, historically, broad and have sought to promote social welfare and social cohesion. A view of education in its widest sense was drawn upon in the Kilbrandon Report of 1964, which argued for children and families services to be located within social education departments. This never happened and services were subsumed within a new social work profession, ostensibly providing cradle to grave welfare. The social work project, however, has lost its way. Social welfare needs a new paradigm and a number of factors suggest that the time is right to explore European models of social pedagogy. These are argued to resonate with Scottish educational and welfare traditions.

Introduction

Since 1971 responsibility for child and family welfare in Scotland has been located within generically organised social work departments. However, social work is deemed in a recent review (Scottish Government 2006) not to be working. European models of social pedagogy are increasingly identified as providing a possible organising framework for work with children (Children in Scotland, 2008). Lorenz argues that, social pedagogy might serve *“as a mirror in which the social work tradition can become aware of its own rich but also contested diversity that already contains many of the same elements as the social pedagogy tradition”* (2008: 641). This paper argues that social pedagogical ideas mirror Scottish traditions of social welfare, which are broadly educational (Smith and Whyte, 2008).

Kilbrandon

Educational themes thread through the 1964 Kilbrandon Report, often thought of as the source document of modern social work in Scotland. Against a backdrop of concern over rising levels of youth crime Lord Kilbrandon was commissioned *“to consider the provisions of the law of Scotland relating to the treatment of juvenile delinquents and juveniles in need of care or protection or beyond parental control...”* (1964, introduction).

The committee deliberately eschewed Anglo-American models of welfare and instead drew on Scandinavian ideas. It concluded that *“similarities in the underlying situation of juvenile offenders ... and children in need of care and protection far outweigh the differences”* and that *“the true distinguishing factor...is their need for special measures of education and training, the normal up-bringing processes having, for whatever reason, fallen short”* (para 15).

Kilbrandon's conception of education was social education, 'education in its widest sense' of 'the whole child', to support the process of 'upbringing'. It was

“to include all children whose educational requirements are not met by the normal educational processes of the home or school” (para 94). Education was thus seen as happening at home as well as at school. The remedy for a failure in ‘upbringing’, was ‘social education’, additional measures of education for the child, and where appropriate for the parents, in order to strengthen *“those natural influences for good which will assist the child's development into a mature and useful member of society”*. A field organisation to support this social education function was identified as a Social Education Department to be located in local authorities under the Director of Education and staffed by social workers. Thus, work with children and families in need was conceived of as broadly educational and was to take place within a universal education system.

The ascendancy of social work

While Kilbrandon located welfare services within a socio-educational framework, a powerful social work lobby with visions of cradle to grave provision emerged from the optimism of the 1960s. Social work was asserted to be a positive and radical force for social change (Brodie *et al*, 2008) and Kilbrandon's notion of social education considered too limiting. The Association of Child Care Officers were of the view that ‘social work goes much beyond the boundaries of social education and cannot be embraced by it even considered in its widest sense.’ (from Hiddleston, 2006: 2). It proposed *“Measures more radical, more logical than proposed by the committee, viz. all the social services should be concentrated in one department”* (Hiddleston, 2006:2). This more radical view was incorporated into the White Paper ‘Social Work and the Community’, (1966), which adopted some of Kilbrandon's ideas but located them within context of a generic social work service. The proposals became enshrined in the Social Work (Scotland) Act (1968), enacted in 1971.

The Children's Hearings system

A cornerstone of the 1968 Act was the inception of children's hearings, the idea for which derived from Kilbrandon. The hearings system involves a panel of three lay volunteers deciding on a case "*in the best interests of the child*". Children can be referred to a hearing on a range of different grounds, including offending and situations reflecting their need for welfare or protection, the assumption being that the underlying needs of those two groups are largely similar.

The rise and fall of social work

While many positive developments followed from the 1968 Act, such as the emergence of a strong community social work strand, there were also contradictions. The new profession was heavily influenced by the American psycho-social tradition (Higham 2001) and most practice developed along individualistic, casework lines. The profession's relationship with the educational establishment was also ambivalent from the outset. Educationalists regarded social work as parvenu in its understanding of how best to work with children and clung to a belief of this being best undertaken within a universal education service.

Social work also lost its way at a discursive level. While Kilbrandon had argued for a whole child approach to dealing with children this ideal became fragmented as social work was led astray by discourses of rights and protection, both of which have been co-opted within a neoliberal, individualistic paradigm. While Jackson, (2004) highlights the emphasis within the Kilbrandon Report and the hearings system on children's social and cultural rights these have been reduced to a far more narrow and legalistic conception of rights. The Children (Scotland) Act (1995), which updated the Social Work (Scotland) Act, marks a shift away from a welfare base "*towards a justice-oriented approach in child-care decision-making where legal principles are uppermost*" (McGhee and Waterhouse, 1998: 49). The children's hearings system is under threat, on the one hand from an

increasingly correctional impulse imported from England and the US, but on the other, from a rights lobby concerned that the welfare focus of the system does not adequately safeguard children's legal rights. Rights, within such a paradigm reflect an *"increasing recourse to law as a means of mediating relationships... premised on particular values and a particular understanding of the subject as a rational, autonomous individual"* (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005: 30). As such they are arguably inimical to wider concerns based around notions of care or relationship.

The second dominant discursive strand in social work, child protection, has crowded out welfare as the basis of engagement with children and families. It has also spawned its own defensive bureaucracy, contributing substantially to the process-driven nature of contemporary social work. At a wider level, discourses of protection chime with a misanthropic zeitgeist, *"... protection involves a very different conception of the relationship between an individual or group, and others than does care. Caring seems to involve taking the concerns and needs of the other as the basis for action. Protection presumes bad intentions and harm"* (Tronto, 1994: 104-5). In this context the police have assumed a lead role in child protection; social needs are increasingly responded to through legal and criminal discourses.

The result of social work being taken in these directions is that it has lost the 'social' dimension of its role. It has become co-opted to neoliberal, legalistic, individualising and blaming ways of working with children and families. This contrasts to practice in most of Europe where the emphasis generally remains on family support within largely social models. When social work is seen as other than 'social', human qualities are lost to the extent that workers often lack basic relational and communication skills (Forrester *et al*, 2008). Motivation and moral purpose are also affected. Bauman argues that, when the essential human and moral aspects of care are obscured behind ever more rules and regulations *"the daily practice of social work (is made) ever more distant from its original ethical impulse"* (Bauman, 2000: 9). It becomes a technical/rational task rather than a relational and moral one.

The winds of change

‘Changing Lives’

In 2004 Scottish Ministers initiated a review of social work, likened in scope to Kilbrandon, a once in a generation opportunity to set the direction for the profession. Nothing was to be ruled in or out. The Review resulted in the publication of the report *Changing Lives* (Scottish Government, 2006), which identifies a profession lacking in confidence and uncertain about its role. Social work, it claims, has lost touch with some of its core purpose and has become unduly process dominated. It concludes that, transformational change was required.

Changing Lives proposes a new para-professional role to undertake routine tasks in order to free up social workers. This proposal might presage a situation where direct work with clients is actually undertaken by para-professionals, leaving diminishing numbers of professionally qualified social workers to undertake what are essentially case management rather than direct engagement roles. In such a scenario these proposed para-professionals become the primary direct workers with children and families. Openings emerge for the development of a direct care worker or pedagogue role, different from an administrative social work one.

Changing Lives also identifies the need for social workers to operate alongside other professionals. At an administrative level, children and families social work services are already being merged with education departments. The former Scottish Government stated that children’s services – *“encompassing education, child welfare, social work, health, leisure and recreation services for children from birth to 18 years - should consider themselves as a single unitary system”* (cited from Menter, 2007:13). These developments are taking place, however, in the absence of any underpinning conceptual framework around children and childhood. Integration is scarcely impacting on professionals’ practice (Menter, 2007). So long as changes take

place only at policy and organisational levels teachers will continue to teach and social workers to process children and families through increasingly procedural and blaming child protection systems. The needs of the whole child will be lost in the professionalisation of distinct disciplines.

Since the publication of *Changing Lives* there has been a significant political development, with the election, in 2007, of a Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) administration to the Scottish Parliament. The new government is committed to asserting distinctively Scottish policy dimensions. And there are elements of distinctive Scottish traditions in child welfare that might be drawn upon.

The possibilities of social pedagogy

European models of social pedagogy increasingly warrant a mention in discussion of children's services. 'Children in Scotland', a major charity advocates the adoption of a 'Scottish pedagogue' model for work with children. A concern, though, is that social pedagogy becomes seized upon as an alternative to a failing social work system rather than being grounded in any wider understanding of the concept. Social pedagogy is less a method than a way of thinking about children and childhood.

Social work as social education

At a time when the future of social work in Scotland is uncertain, social pedagogy may provide pointers to its future direction. The literature review on the role of the social worker, undertaken for *Changing Lives* says that social pedagogy foregrounds "*working directly with people much as promised by the core values of social work*" (Asquith et al 2005: 24), values that are acknowledged as having been diminished in the profession's recent history. The use of 'self' that is central to social pedagogy is also commended as an important quality, though one that is under-emphasised in current social work.

Adopting ideas of social pedagogy would require that social work be re-thought as being essentially educational. Cree makes this point, arguing, *“When we stop seeing social work as a narrow, municipally based, bureaucratic activity, we start to see that it is, at its deepest level, a form of education. ... what might be called ‘social education’ – it (is) about getting alongside people in a process of change, about bringing about change, within individuals and communities...”* (2008).

Locating social work within a broadly educational framework resonates with Scottish traditions of education and social welfare. Education is seen as having *“a key role in tackling a range of social problems and in promoting cohesion in a more diverse society”* (Bloomer, 2008: 32). Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Executive, 2006), which sets out principles governing children’s education aims to develop successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens. As such it embraces *“a broad view of education, which focuses on the development of the whole person in a social setting”* (Bloomer, 2008: 32). This broad conception of education reflects Kilbrandon’s proposals for social education departments. Asquith et al suggest that *“there are grounds to believe that what (Kilbrandon) intended was not an ‘education’ department in the traditional sense but rather a department based on principles much akin to those of social pedagogy. The social education department proposed by Kilbrandon may well have had its roots more in the notion of allowing an individual to realise his/her potential in society, much as with the role of the educteur in France”* (2005).

Returning to Kilbrandon and social education acknowledges the fundamental soundness of proposals that were only briefly realized within social work as it developed. A shift towards social pedagogy might allow social work to reclaim some of its original aspirations. The timing is perhaps apposite. The SNP government professes to aspire to social democratic traditions with strong connections to those of Nordic countries. William Roe who chaired *Changing Lives* suggests that the new Government is also disposed to explore methods for building common values and language between

professionals. He goes on to say that he would have liked *Changing Lives* to recommend a professional “*equipped to work with children and families across all disciplines that make up the children’s service sector. There remain a lot of professional barriers between distinct disciplines in Scotland and the pedagogue model ...could, over time help to break these down*” (2008: 37). There is resistance, nonetheless, to the wholesale adoption of pedagogical models, much of this converging around how well understood the term ‘social pedagogue’ might be in a Scottish context. Yet in failing to call it by name, and in so doing joining a European mainstream, the impact of adopting social pedagogic ideas is likely to be lessened.

A unifying concept: the idea of ‘upbringing’

An attraction of social pedagogy as a model for working with children and families is that it provides a unifying concept within which to locate such work, based around the idea of ‘upbringing’. In Germany the term for a pedagogue, *Erzieher*, or ‘upbringer’, resonates with Kilbrandon’s identification of the centrality of ‘upbringing’ in all work with children and families. Upbringing goes far beyond partial discourses of rights or protection to encompass all that is required for children to develop into healthy and competent adults. It is primarily educational; the Latin term *educare* encapsulating all that is required to bring up a child physically and mentally, Kilbrandon’s notion of “education in its widest sense”. Education in its widest sense is also inherently social. Socio-educational approaches would seem best able to promote the development of social and human capital in societies suffering the consequences of neoliberal individualism. In Scotland social pedagogy perhaps has the potential to put the ‘social’ back into social work.

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